Friends of TOP Sidebar to David Orr’s Cover Article, Fall 2011

Over the last year, a group of alumni and national leaders in sustainability were captivated by the vision and power of The Oberlin Project. We witnessed a planning process that has already catalyzed millions of dollars of financial support and was developing a practical, whole-system approach to transform the City of Oberlin and the College into a replicable model of full spectrum sustainability. And we asked David Orr, “How can we help?”

David said two things: 1) we need hundreds (eventually thousands) of supporters of the project who will bring their time, talent, and treasury to assure success, and 2) we need supporters who will help with raising the tough dollars to hire the first project managers and do the early stage planning and development work.

So was born Friends of The Oberlin Project. We heard David Orr’s request, and we set a few simple but ambitious goals for 2011:

- To find the first 100 committed Founding Friends of The Oberlin Project, including community members, Oberlin alumni, and national leaders in the field of sustainability. We decided to begin by asking people already close to the project to “close ranks” and march together.

- To raise $1 million over five years from our Founding Friends—100 individuals willing to invest on average $2,000 for each of five years.

- To support hiring staff for The Oberlin Project and advance early-stage planning. These funds are key in leveraging additional support from other funders by demonstrating wide and growing support for the project.

What does it mean to be a Friend of The Oberlin Project? To begin, you are joining a group of like-minded people to provide financial support. You may also be tapped to help to advise on specific matters of design and implementation or use your contacts to help build media awareness. David Orr and other key leaders will provide updates on The Oberlin Project, and Friends will have meetings in Oberlin and in cities across the country. Most importantly you will have the satisfaction of making a meaningful and lasting difference to Oberlin and the world.

How are we doing so far? We found 50+ Friends and raised nearly $600,000. We attracted a number of non-Obie sustainability leaders and community leaders in Oberlin. We hosted “learning evenings” about The Oberlin Project in Washington, D.C. and New York City. We successfully brought new sustainable financing opportunities to the college and The Oberlin Project. We leveraged great national expertise in our network and new voices have emerged to work with College Trustees as well as City and College leaders, thereby strengthening the practical vision of the Project. We drafted bylaws to organize as an official Friends Group in the Oberlin Community. Most importantly we made a start, a beginning, to gather a growing group of people to support the Oberlin Project. Step by step we grow.

On a personal note, when I was in Oberlin in October 2010 for the 10th Anniversary Celebration of the Adam Joseph Lewis Center, I heard national leaders repeatedly remark, “The Oberlin Project is the most important full-spectrum sustainability initiative in America.” I was impressed that small-town Oberlin, and the surrounding community, could be making such a difference. But then I looked around the room acknowledging that deep and meaningful change takes a long time, and a lot of preparation. I realized that Oberlin has been preparing for this challenge since its founding. Please join us by becoming a Friend of The Oberlin Project.